

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2503

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 6 DAMASCUS 2153

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AMGT, PFOR, US, SY

SUBJECT: PARM: ANNUAL POLICY AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT FY 1979

PART I

REF: CERP 0001

1. IN LOOKING AHEAD TO FY 1979, ROUGHLY A YEAR AND A  
HALF FROM NOW, I BELIEVE THE PRIMARY LONG-TERM U.S.  
INTERESTS IN SYRIA WILL CONTINUE TO BE:

A. TO SUPPORT AMERICAN POLICY WITH REGARD TO THE

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT; AND

B. TO STRENGTHEN BILATERAL RELATIONS, REESTABLISHED  
IN 1974, BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND SYRIA.

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2. THIS BROAD FORMULATION EMBRACES BOTH OUR IMMEDIATE  
PRIORITY OBJECTIVE OF ACTIVELY PROMOTING A PEACE SETTLE-  
MENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARABS AND WHAT MAY BE BY  
1979 HAVE BECOME THE LESSER INCLUDED GOAL OF STAVING OFF  
ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI WAR. MUCH AS SYRIA NOW DESIRES PEACE  
ITS LEADERS HAVE WARNED ON MANY OCCASIONS, MOST RECENTLY  
DURING THE SECRETARY'S FEBRUARY VISIT, THAT THERE ARE

DEFINITE TIME LIMITS TO SYRIA'S ABILITY TO ENGAGE IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE. THEY WILL NOT ACQUIESCE IN THE RETURN TO A FROZEN SITUATION OF NO PEACE NO WAR WHICH WOULD LEAVE THE IDF IN OCCUPATION OF SOME 1,100 SQUARE KILOMETERS OF SYRIAN TERRITORY ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS ON WHICH 24 ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS ARE BECOMING DAILY MORE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW LONG SYRIA WILL BE PAREPARED TO MAINTAIN ITS CURRENT MODERATION; THIS WILL DEPEND ON ITS PERCEPTION OF WHETHER THAT POLICY IS PRODUCING RESULTS. BUT IF PROGRESS IS NOT ACHIEVED WELL BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF FY 1979 IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT A COMBINATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES WILL HAVE BEGUN FORCING ASAD INTO MORE MILITANT, LESS ACCOMOMODATING POLICIES VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL AND THE POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATIONS.

3. IT SHOULD BE OUR GOAL TO HAVE DEVELOPED BY EARLY FY 1979 A BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP OF SUFFICIENT BREADTH, MUTUAL BENEFIT AND CONFIDENCE THAT THE SYRIANS WILL SEE ADVANTAGES TO MAINTAINING THEIR TIES WITH THE UNITED STATES EVEN IN THE EVENT OF ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI WAR. IN SUCH AN EVENTUALITY, HOWEVER, OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS AT EVEN THE MOST FUNDA-MENTAL LEVEL WOULD COME UNDER TREMENDOUS PRESSURE.

4. U.S.-SYRIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE EVOLUTION OF U.S.-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS. OUR EFFORTS HERE HAVE BEEN DIRECTED IN PART TO DEVELOP A STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL TIES WHICH WILL BE INSULATED TO A CERTAIN EXTENT FROM THE COURSE OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT--AND THE PRESENT SYRIAN LEADERSHIP I BELIEVE SHARES THAT GOAL.  
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I FIND THE CONCLUSION INESCAPABLE, HOWEVER, THAT SYRIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S. OVER THE NEXT ONE-THREE YEARS IS GOING TO DEPEND TO AN IMPORTANT DEGREE ON OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PALESTINIANS AND THE PLO. THE LEGITIMACY OF THE PLO AS SINE QUA NON ARBITER OF THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE INSOFAR AS THE ARAB PARTIES ARE CONCERNED HAS BECOME SUCH AN ACCEPTED AND INTEGRAL PART OF SYRIAN POLICY THAT U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS WILL SUFFER IF A WAY IS NOT FOUND TO INCLUDE THE PLO IN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. IF PROGRESS IS MADE TOWARDS ESTABLISHING A U.S.-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE AND TOWARDS INCLUSION OF THE PLO IN THE PEACE PROCESS THIS WILL HAVE A FAVORABLE IMPACT ON U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS. CONVERSELY IF THE CURRENT STANDOFF IS MAINTAINED, WITH THE PLO REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO EXIST IN THE AREA AS A JEWISH STATE AND REJECTING UNSC RESES 338 AND 242 AS THE BASIS FOR SETTLEMENT, AND WITH THE USG REFUSING TO CONSIDER DEALING WITH THE PLO UNTIL IT ACCEPTS THESE SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS AND ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST--IF THIS STANDOFF PERSISTS

FOR WHATEVER REASONS, SYRIA WILL INEVITABLY ATTRIBUTE THE MAJOR PART OF THE BLAME TO THE UNITED STATES FOR IT AND COOLER, MORE DISTANT BILATERAL RELATIONS WILL BE THE RESULT. THE CURRENT GRACE PERIOD ON THIS ISSUE WILL HAVE BEGUN TO RUN OUT WELL BEFORE 1979.

5. THE PRINCIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS IN THE AREA WHICH WILL HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF U.S. OBJECTIVES ARE:

A. THE STABILITY OF THE ASAD REGIME: NO LEADER IN SYRIA'S INDEPENDENT HISTORY TO DATE HAS BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS HAFEZ AL-ASAD IN RULING THE INTRICATE MOSIAC OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL GROUPS INCORPORATED WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SYRIAN STATE. DESPITE HIS SEVEN-YEAR TENURE IN OFFICE, HOWEVER THESE DIVERSE AND OFTEN CENTRIFUGAL FORCES ARE VERY MUCH ALIVE AND ACTIVE IN TODAY'S  
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SYRIA. DISSENT AND COMPETITION AMONG THE ALAWITE CLANS, ISLAMIC FANATICISM IN THE SUNNI HEARTLAND OF CENTRAL SYRIA AND TRADITIONAL DRUZE INDEPENDENCE AND SUSPICION OF THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN DAMASCUS ARE PERMANENT ASPECTS OF THE SYRIAN SCENE WITH WHICH ANY REGIME MUST DEAL. POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION, WHICH ON THE LEFT ALONE SEES TWO WINGS OF THE SYRIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, SEVERAL TENDENCIES WITHIN THE RULING BAATH PARTY, THREE NEO-NASSERIST PARTIES AND A RENASCENT PPS, ALL COMPETING FOR POLITICAL POWER ADDS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THE VARIANT FORCES WITH WHICH ANY SYRIAN LEADER MUST CONTEND. FURTHER

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COMPLICATING THIS INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE ARE THE BITTER ANIMOSITIES OF THE BAATHI REGIME IN IRAQ TOWARDS ASAD'S GOVERNMENT AND THE SWINGING PENDULUM OF SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS. BOTH IRAQ AND EGYPT POSSESS POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE ASSETS WITHIN SYRIA. DOMINATING THIS ACTIVE AND SHIFTING ARRAY OF FORCES REQUIRES ENORMOUS EFFORT AND ATTENTION. ASAD HAS DONE IT SUCCESSFULLY OVER THE PAST SEVEN YEARS THROUGH A COMBINATION OF OUTTHINKING, OUTWORKING AND OUTLASTING HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS AND THROUGH GOOD LUCK. HE AND HIS SUPPORTERS ARE THE DOMINANT INFLUENCES WITHIN THE MILITARY, THE BAATH PARTY AND THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY. SEVERAL ACTIVE AND COMPETING SECURITY SERVICES AS WELL AS RIF'AT AL-ASAD'S DEFENSE COMPANIES AND ADNAN AL-ASAD'S STRUGGLE COMPANIES FORM AN INTRICATE SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND COUNTER CHECKS WHICH MAKE A COUP AGAINST ASAD HIGHLY UNLIKELY. HIS REGIME'S VULNERABILITY LIES MORE IN THE RISK OF AN ASSASSIN'S BULLET THAN IN AN ORGANIZED COUP D'ETAT. THE IDENTITY AND ORIENTATION OF  
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A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR REGIME CANNOT NOW BE DETERMINED ALTHOUGH ITS LEADERS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE MILITARY. EVEN IF THEIR OUTLOOK PROVED MODERATE IN THE PEACE PROCESS, A CHANGE OF POWER WOULD INEVITABLY BE FOLLOWED BY A PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION AND AN ACCOMPANYING DISINCLINATION OR INABILITY ON THEIR PART TO ENGAGE IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. U.S. INTERESTS REQUIRE THE MAINTENANCE OF A MODERATE, STABLE REGIME IN SYRIA. THIS CAN ONLY MEAN AT PRESENT SUPPORTING THE ASAD REGIME AND ENCOURAGING ITS CURRENT ORIENTATIONS.

B. EVOLUTION OF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON.

SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR IN SPRING 1975, ITS COURSE AND OUTCOME HAVE BEEN AN OBSESSION TO SYRIA. THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD, BEGINNING WITH ITS EXTENSION OF POLITICAL GOOD OFFICES, TO ITS UNILATERAL MILITARY INTERVENTION, TO THE CURRENT STAGE OF ITS ARAB-ENDORSED MILITARY OCCUPATION, SYRIA'S GOALS HAVE REMAINED

CONSTANT: TO MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF THE LEBANESE STATE AND RESTORE THE TYPE OF GOVERNMENT POWER IN LEBANON WHICH WOULD NOT RISK DRAWING SYRIA INTO ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT AT A TIME AND PLACE NOT TO ITS CHOOSING. THIS HAS MEANT OPPOSING THE EMERGENCE OF A RADICAL, LEFTIST, PALESTINIAN SUPPORTED GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON OR IN THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF A PARTITIONED LEBANON. OVER THE PAST YEAR THIS POLICY HAS PRODUCED MAJOR STRAINS IN SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS MAJOR ARMS SUPPLIER, THE SOVIET UNION, AND WITH OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS, PARTICULARLY IRAQ, LIBYA, EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA AS WELL AS WITH THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND TO A LESSER EXTENT WITH ISRAEL AND THE U.S. SYRIA WAS CAREFUL NOT TO ALLOW THESE TENSIONS TO BUILD UP TO THE POINT OF RUPTURE AND TO DATE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACCOMMODATING THE OFTEN COMPETING INTERESTS OF THESE COUNTRIES IN LEBANON WITHOUT SACRIFICING ITS BASIC OBJECTIVES. INABILITY OF  
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ITS PRESENT POLICY TO PRODUCE RESULTS IN LEBANON, HOWEVER, COULD LEAD SYRIA EVENTUALLY TO ADOPT A DIFFERENT COURSE EITHER BY WITHDRAWING ITS UNITS FROM LEBANON BEFORE A SUFFICIENTLY STRONG INDIGENOUS LEBANESE FORCE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AND THEREBY RISKING RENEWAL OF FACTITNAL FIGHTING, OR BY ALTERING ITS CURRENT POLICY OF SUPPORTING PRESIDENT SARKIS, THROUGH PUTTING PRESSURE ON EXTREME ELEMENTS ON BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT TO ACCOMMODATE THEMSELVES TO HIS OBJECTIVES, IN FAVOR OF SUPPORTING LEFTISTS AND PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS. WHILE I CONSIDER BOTH THESE ALTERNATIVES REMOTE IN THE NEAR TERM, ACHIEVING THE U.S. OBJECTIVE OF RESTORATION OF A UNIFIED MODERATE NON-CONFRONTATIONAL GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON DEPENDS HEAVILY ON SYRIA'S PRESENT CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE.

C. WHETHER THE DOMINANT ARAB COALITION IN SUPPORT OF A PEACE SETTLEMENT CAN BE MAINTAINED:

THE YEAR 1976 CLOSED WITH A CONVERGENCE OF FORCES IN THE ARAB WORLD IN FAVOR OF RENEWED EFFORTS TO SEEK A PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL. AT THE CENTER OF THIS COALITION STOOD SAUDI ARABIA SUPPORTED ON ONE SIDE BY THE RECONCILED CONFRONTATION STATES OF EGYPT AND SYRIA (AND JORDAN) AND ON THE OTHER BY THE MODERATE REGIMES OF THE GULF. THE PALESTINIANS, WILLY NILLY, WERE BEING ATTRACTED TOWARD THIS ORBIT. LIBYA AND IRAQ WERE ISOLATED IN THEIR REJECTION OF ANY PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL. MOMENTS OF ARAB UNITY IN THE RECENT PAST, HOWEVER, HAVE PROVED FLEETING AND IT IS UNCERTAIN HOW LONG THIS RESURGENCE OF "ARAB SOLIDARITY" IN FAVOR OF A PEACE SETTLEMENT CAN BE HAINTAINED. IT COULD BE UPSET BY RENEWED VIOLENCE IN

LEBANON, AN UPHEAVAL IN EGYPT OR A REVERSAL OF CURRENT SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN TRENDS TOWARDS MODERATION. IT COULD ALSO FALL APART BY THE MERE PASSAGE OF TIME AND THE NATURAL REEMERGENCE OF INTER-ARAB SUSPICIONS WHICH LIE JUST BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE CURRENT RECONCILIATION.  
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SAUDI INFLUENCE WILL WEIGH IMPORTANTLY IN MAINTAINING THE COHESIVENESS OF THE CURRENT ARAB COALITION FOR PEACE.

D. SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA AND TOWARDS THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS:

SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AREA SINCE THE 1973 WAR HAS DECLINED STEADILY. DESPITE THIS FACT AND DESPITE ITS EXCLUSION FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES FROM NEGOTIATION OF THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL AND SYRIA AND ISRAEL, THE SOVIET UNION HAS REMAINED COMMITTED TO A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAEL CONFLICT, ALBEIT ON ARAB TERMS. THERE IS A

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DANGER THAT AS SOVIET INFLUENCE CONTINUES TO DECLINE IT WILL ADOPT A MORE DISRUPTIVE POLICY IN THE HOPE OF REVERSING THE GENERAL TREND OF EVENTS IN THE AREA AND REESTABLISHING ITS INFLUENCE ON THE BASIS OF CHAMPIONING THE ARABS IN THEIR STRUGGLE TO "REGAIN THEIR USURPED TERRITORY AND RIGHTS" FROM ISRAEL. THE U.S. INTEREST LIES IN PREVENTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DESTRUCTIVE SOVIET ROLE. THIS CAN BE DONE BY CONTINUING TO ENCOURAGE CURRENT SYRIAN POLICIES WHICH HAVE BEEN MOVING AWAY FROM DEPENDENCE ON THE SOVIETS (EXCEPT FOR ARMS SUPPLIES) WHILE OFFERING THE SOVIET UNION SUFFICIENT PARTICIPATION AND STAKE IN THE PEACE SETTLEMENT PROCESS TO MINIMIZE THE TEMPTATION ON ITS LEADERS TO PLAY A SPOILING ROLE.

E. EVOLUTION OF THE PLO:

WEAKENED BY ITS ARMED CONFLICT WITH THE SYRIANS AND CHRISTIAN FORCES IN LEBANON AND INFLUENCED BY RENEWED  
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ARAB EFFORTS TO SEEK A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL, THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP FINDS ITSELF MANEUVERING TO BENEFIT FROM THE FRUITS OF POTENTIAL PEACE SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT BEING OBLIGATED TO SACRIFICE EITHER ITS INDEPENDENCE OR ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES. MANY INDIVIDUAL PALESTINIAN LEADERS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS PROFESS A NEW ATTITUDE OF FLEXIBILITY TOWARDS NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL. PROGRESS TOWARDS A PEACE SETTLEMENT COULD ENCOURAGE THESE TRENDS TOWARDS MODERATION BOTH FROM WITHIN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT AND THROUGH INCREASING MODERATE ARAB PRESSURES ON IT. LACK OF PROGRESS ON THE OTHER HAND COULD LEAD TO A RESURGENCE OF REJECTIONIST SENTIMENT AMONG PALESTINIAN LEADERS IMPELLING THEM TOWARD A RENEWAL OF GUERRILLA WARFARE WITH ISRAEL BY WHATEVER MEANS THEY HAVE AVAILABLE AND TOWARD ADVOCATING AND CAMPAIGNING FOR REJECTIONIST POLICIES ON ARAB GOVERNMENTS. SYRIA HAS AN IMPORTANT INFLUENCE ON PALESTINIAN POLICIES THROUGH ITS TRADITIONAL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, THE SHELTER AND SUPPORT IT PROVIDES TO PALESTINIAN REFUGEES AND FEDAYEEN GROUPS AND THE IMAGE ASAD ENJOYS AS A REVOLUTIONARY ARAB NATIONALIST AND LEADER. CONVERSELY, THE PALESTINIANS HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON SYRIAN POLICIES BECAUSE THEIR CAUSE HAS BECOME SANCTIFIED AS THE MORAL CORE OF INTER-ARAB POLICY. U.S. INTERESTS WILL BEST BE SERVED BY ENCOURAGING FURTHER MODERATION OF PLO POSITIONS.

5. GIVEN THAT THE PRINCIPAL U.S. INTEREST IN SYRIA CONCERN A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUND AND COOPERATIVE BILATERAL  
TIES, IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED THAT SYRIA WILL ALSO HAVE  
A ROLE TO PLAY WITH REGARD TO OTHER IMPORTANT U.S.  
OBJECTIVES:

A. KEEPING ARAB OIL AVAILABLE TO THE WEST AT AN  
AFFORDABLE PRICE:  
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IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT BY FY 1979 SYRIA (CURRENT  
CRUDE PRODUCTION 10M TONS PER ANNUM) WILL BE A MEMBER  
OF OPEC. EVEN IF THIS IS NOT THE CASE, SYRIAN ACTIVISM  
WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN THE IMPOSITION  
OF ANY FUTURE ARAB OIL EMBARGO.

B. MAINTENANCE OF MODERATE REGIMES IN THE ARAB PENINSULA:

THIS WILL DEPEND ON CONTAINING THE SPREAD OF  
RADICAL ARAB IDEOLOGIES AND SOVIET INFLUENCE. CONTINUING  
THE GRADUAL REORIENTATION OF SYRIA ECONOMICALLY AND  
POLITICALLY TOWARD THE WEST WILL HELP PROTECT THE PENINSULA  
FROM SUCH INFLUENCES. IF ON THE OTHER HAND SYRIA SHIFTED  
DIRECTION AND JOINED THE ARAB RADICALS AND PALESTINIAN  
REJECTIONISTS, A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN THE ARAB BALANCE  
OF POWER COULD RESULT.

C. RESTORATION OF A UNIFIED, MODERATE NON-CONFRONTATIONAL  
GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON:

SYRIA IS IN A POSITION TO EXERCISE A DOMINANT  
INFLUENCE ON LEBANESE EVENTS. MODIFICATION OF ITS CURRENT  
CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE ALONG ANY OF THE LINES SUGGESTED IN  
SUB-PARAGRAPH 4 (B) ABOVE COULD REVIVE LEBANESE INSTABILITY  
AND IMPEDE ATTAINMENT OF U.S. OBJECTIVES.

D. IMPROVING THE OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA:

IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, OUR GOAL SHOULD BE TO  
ENCOURAGE AND ACCELERATE THE PRESENT TREND TOWARD  
RELAXATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON THE SYRIAN JEWISH  
COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO PROVIDE BOTH DIRECT AND INDIRECT  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMIGRATION. IN THE LONGER TERM, U.S.  
POLICY SHOULD SEEK TO ENLARGE THE APPLICATION OF INTER-  
NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED HUMAN RIGHTS TO ALL SYRIAN CITIZENS.  
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E. ACHIEVING AS MUCH SYRIAN SUPPORT AS POSSIBLE FOR  
U.S. OBJECTIVES ON NORTH/SOUTH ISSUES:

SYRIA PROCLAIMS ITSELF TO BE A REVOLUTIONARY  
GOVERNMENT, A MEMBER OF THE THIRD WORLD, AN ARDENT SUPPORTER  
OF LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND AN OPPONENT OF "NEO-IMPERIALISM"  
IN ALL ITS FORMS AND INTERPRETATIONS. ITS PRIMARY EFFORTS  
TO DATE IN THIRD WORLD AND NON-ALIGNED FORUMS, HOWEVER,  
HAVE BEEN TO GARNER SUPPORT FOR ARAB POSITIONS IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. THIS PRIORITY WILL CONTINUE TO  
DOMINATE ITS THIRD WORLD POLICIES AND IT WILL CONTINUE  
TO BARTER ITS SUPPORT ON NORTH/SOUTH  
AND REGIONAL ISSUES (E.G., PUERTO RICO, NORTH KOREA)  
FOR MORE THIRD WORLD SUPPORT FOR THE ARAB CAUSE. AS  
LONG AS SYRIA SEES HOPE FOR A FAVORABLE EVOLUTION OF  
U.S. POLICY, HOWEVER, THERE WILL BE OPPORTUNITIES TO  
PRESENT U.S. VIEWS ON THESE ISSUES WITH SOME HOPE OF  
INFLUENCING THE SYRIAN POSITION.

F. PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL:

WHILE NOT A PRODUCER OF NARCOTICS, SYRIA HAS  
IN THE PAST BEEN A TRANSIT ROUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL

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NARCOTICS TRAFFIC AND A PROCESSING POINT FOR TURKISH PRODUCED OPIUM. SHOULD USE OF THESE ROUTES AND PROCESSING STATIONS BE RESUMED, THE U.S. WILL REQUIRE SYRIAN COOPERATION IN INTERDICTING THE FLOW OF THESE NARCOTICS TO THE U.S.

G. ENCOURAGING POPULATION CONTROL IN SYRIA:

ONE-HALF OF SYRIA'S POPULATION IS UNDER 15 YEARS OF AGE. POPULATION CONTROL WILL ENHANCE BOTH SYRIA'S OWN DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL AND ITS ABILITY TO BECOME A MAJOR FOOD EXPORTER TO THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE FUTURE.

H. PROMOTION OF U.S. EXPORTS TO SYRIA:

EXPANSION OF POTENTIAL MARKETS FOR U.S. PRODUCTS IN SYRIA WILL ACT TO REDUCE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS DEFICITS AND STRENGTHEN U.S. ECONOMIC PRODUCTION. GREATER RELIANCE  
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ON U.S. SUPPLIERS WILL ALSO GIVE SYRIA AN ADDITIONAL STAKE IN MAINTAINING CORDIAL BILATERAL RELATIONS.

I. PREVENTING NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION:

SYRIA, LIKE MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, IS INTRIGUED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR BOTH PEACEFUL AND MILITARY PURPOSES. U.S. POLICY SHOULD SEEK TO ASSURE THAT SYRIA ENTERS THE NUCLEAR WORLD WITH A FULL APPRECIATION OF THE NEED FOR EXTENSIVE PLANNING AND SAFEGUARDS AND SHOULD SEEK TO PREVENT THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANY SYRIAN MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITY.

J. ATTAINMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL MANDATES IN THE PROVISION OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE:

IN PROVIDING FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA, THE U.S. SHOULD SEEK TO ASSURE THAT SUCH ASSISTANCE TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT POSSIBLE REACHES THE RURAL AND POOR ELEMENTS OF SYRIAN SOCIETY AND DOES NOT HAVE ANY HARMFUL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.

5. WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK OF PRINCIPAL U.S. OBJECTIVES, VARIOUS SECTORS OF ACTIVITY CAN BE EXAMINED AND SUBORDINATE OBJECTIVES AND COURSES OF ACTION SET FORTH.

6. POLITICAL RELATIONS:

A PROMISING FOUNDATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BI-LATERAL POLITICAL RELATIONS HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED BY THE COMMITMENT OF THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN PURSUIT OF A MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT AND BY THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WHICH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING WITH SYRIA'S LEADERS. THIS RELATIONSHIP IS BEING REINFORCED BY CONTINUING U.S. SUPPORT FOR SYRIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON  
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AND FOR OUR COMMON GOAL OF RESTORING A UNIFIED CENTRAL GOVERNMENT UNDER PRESIDENT SARKIS. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SYRIA AND THE U.S. AT MANY LEVELS HAS BECOME NORMAL AND IS INCREASING. IN THIS CONTEXT, SUBORDINATE POLITICAL OBJECTIVES ARE:

A. TO ANALYZE AND REPORT ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SYRIAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS WHICH COULD AFFECT U.S. INTERESTS IN THE AREA.

B. TO DEVELOP GREATER SYRIAN UNDERSTANDING OF, AND WHERE POSSIBLE SUPPORT FOR, U.S. POLICIES ON MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE TO US. THIS MEANS DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING FRUITFUL CONTACTS WITH POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL SYRIANS AT ALL LEVELS, PARTICULARLY IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND PRESIDENCY, AMONG MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COMMANDS OF THE BAATH PARTY AND THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FRONT, WITH MILITARY LEADERS, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND IN THE ACADEMIC, PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS COMMUNITIES. MOST IMPORTANT, IT REQUIRES CULTIVATION OF SYRIA'S PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL-ASAD THROUGH PERIODIC CONSULTATION AND EXCHANGES OF MESSAGE ON SUBJECTS OF COMMON INTEREST. ASAD, LIKE MANY ARABS, SETS GREAT STORE ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IS CURRENTLY LOOKING FORWARD TO ESTABLISHING SUCH A RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT CARTER.

C. TO ASSIST SYRIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING DEVELOPING A GREATER SYRIAN STAKE IN ITS OWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES FOR THIS PURPOSE. SUCH ORIENTATIONS, IN THE LONG TERM, WILL INCREASE SYRIAN WILLINGNESS TO COME TO A POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION WITH ISRAEL.

7. POSSIBLE ISSUES:

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A. CONTACT WITH THE PLO:

THE PROS AND CONS OF THIS SENSITIVE SUBJECT HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED AND DEBATED. I NEED NOT REPEAT THEM. IT MAY BE WORTH MENTIONING HERE, HOWEVER, THAT SHOULD WE DECIDE TO ESTABLISH SUCH CONTACTS SYRIA WOULD BE A FAVORABLE LOCALE TO DO SO. NOT ONLY WOULD SUCH ACTION IN SYRIA HAVE A FAVORABLE IMPACT ON SYRIAN/U.S. RELATIONS BUT ALSO WE WOULD MERELY BE FOLLOWING IN THE PATTERN ALREADY ESTABLISHED BY MANY RESIDENT DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS, INCLUDING THE BRITISH AND FRENCH AMBASSADORS, OF MAINTAINING REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE DAMASCUS-BASED PALESTINIAN LEADERS. THE MOST PROMINENT OF THESE ARE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT KHALED FAHUM, PLO EXCOMM MEMBERS ABD AL-MUHSIN, ABU MAYZAR, ZUHAYR MUHSIN, ABU MAZIN AND ABU MAHER, AND PLA COMMANDER MISBAH BADAYRI.

B. CONTACT WITH THE ERITREAN LIBERATION FRON AND OTHER ERITREAN LEADERS.

WHEN THIS ISSUE WAS RAISED IN THE PAST, THE DEPARTMENT WAS RELUCTANT TO AUTHORIZE SUCH CONTACTS BEYOND ONE INSTANCE INVOLVING PASSING MESSAGES TO AN AMERICAN HOSTAGE. SYRIA CONTINUES TO BE A STEADFAST SUPPORTER OF THE ERITREAN CAUSE; THE ELF MAINTAINS AN OFFICE IN DAMASCUS AND ERITREAN POLITICAL LEADERS FREQUENTLY VISIT

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 PER-01 SIG-01 A-01  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2507  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
/USINT BAGHDAD 402  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT VIA POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 5 OF 6 DAMASCUS 2153

THE SYRIAN CAPITAL. IF THE CHANCES OF ULTIMATE ERITREAN SUCCESS ARE INCREASING AND IF COOPERATIVE RELATIONS WITH THOSE WHO MAY EVENTUALLY RULE A STRATEGIC PORTION OF THE HORN OF AFRICA ARE CONSIDERED IMPORTANT TO US, IT MAY BE WORTHWHILE RECONSIDERING WHETHER THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF SUCH CONTACTS MIGHT OUTWEIGH THE ADDITIONAL STRAIN THEY WOULD PLACE ON OUR RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA.

C. THE MOST APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA TO SUPPORT OUR POLITICAL OBJECTIVES:

REALIZING THAT THE FIGURES OF \$90 MILLION PER ANNUM IN FAA ASSISTANCE AND \$20 MILLION PER ANNUM IN PL-480 CONCESSIONAL FINANCING WERE INITIALLY ARRIVED AT SOMEWHAT ARBITRARILY AND WITHOUT A PRECISE ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS AND CAPACITIES, THESE HAVE NOW BEEN THE USG PLANNING FIGURES FOR ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS. THEY HAVE THUS TAKEN ON A CONFIDENTIAL

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POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE FUTURE. WHILE REDUCTIONS MIGHT WELL BE CONSIDERED IN A POST SETTLEMENT PHASE, WHEN SYRIA WOULD PRESUMABLY BE ABLE TO DEVOTE MORE OF ITS OWN RESOURCES TO DEVELOPMENT, ANY REDUCTION IN THESE LEVELS DURING THE COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE READ AS A NEGATIVE POLITICAL SIGNAL, ESPECIALLY IF IT WERE NOT ACCOMPANIED BY SIMILAR REDUCTIONS IN OTHER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN THE AREA, PARTICULARLY ISRAEL'S.

8. ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

U.S./SYRIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS HAVE EVOLVED FAVORABLY WITH STEADY IMPROVEMENT IN U.S. EXPORTS IN TERMS OF BOTH TOTAL VOLUME AND PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL SYRIAN IMPORTS DURING EACH OF THE LAST FOUR YEARS. IN 1976, U.S. EXPORTS ATTAINED \$272 MILLION. A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IS BEING ESTABLISHED WITH THE CURRENT \$80 MILLION FY 1977 AID PROGRAM, THE \$90 MILLION FY 1978 AID REQUEST, CONCLUSION OF THIRD ANNUAL PL-480 PROGRAM, NEGOTIATION OF A CCC CREDIT PROGRAM AND PARTICIPATION FOR THE FOURTH STRAIGHT YEAR IN THE DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR. CONCLUSION OF OPIC AGREEMENT IN 1976 WILL ALSO ENCOURAGE POTENTIAL INVESTORS. IN ADDITION, SARG IS RELYING HEAVILY, THOUGH NOT EXCLUSIVELY, ON U.S. INTERNATIONAL BANKS TO HANDLE ITS FOREIGN DEPOSITS AND FOREIGN TRADE TRANSACTIONS.

THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE HAS BEEN HURT, HOWEVER, BY SYRIAN INELIGIBILITY FOR EXIM CREDITS AND THE REDUCED AVAILABILITY OF SYRIAN FOREIGN EXCHANGE OWING TO ITS INTERVENTION IN LEBANON AND LOWER THAN EXPECTED ARAB PAYMENTS. INSTABILITY IN LEBANON HAS FRIGHTENED OFF SOME POTENTIAL SELLERS AND INVESTORS, AND TIGHTER ARAB BOYCOTT LEGISLATION IN THE U.S. IS ANOTHER CLOUD ON THE HORIZON. ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES IN THE COMING PERIOD ARE:

A. TO BROADEN THE AREA OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN SYRIA AND THE U.S. AND SETTLE OUTSTANDING U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CLAIMS ARISING FROM THE 1967 BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND PREVIOUS SYRIAN NATIONALIZATIONS.

B. TO DEVELOP SYRIAN RECEPTIVITY TO AND MARKETS FOR U.S. GOODS AND SERVICES AND PREPARE A FAVORABLE CLIMATE FOR U.S. INVESTMENT IN SYRIA.

C. TO ANALYZE AND REPORT ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SYRIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS OF IMPORTANCE TO U.S.;

D. TO DEVELOP GREATER SYRIAN UNDERSTANDING OF, AND WHERE POSSIBLE SUPPORT FOR, U.S. POLICIES ON MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE TO US (E.G., GATT, INTERNATIONAL ENERGY COOPERATION).

9. POSSIBLE ISSUES:

A. DOES THE CONTINUED DENIAL OF EXIM BANK CREDITS AND GUARANTEES FURTHER U.S. INTERESTS? THE POSITION OF THE EXIM BANK HAS BEEN THAT SYRIAN ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE MAKES LENDING RISKY AND THAT DENIAL OF ELIGIBILITY WILL PROMOTE MORE RAPID SETTLEMENT OF EXIM'S SMALL (\$80,000) OUTSTANDING CLAIM IN SYRIA. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES BOTH THESE POINTS ARE CONTESTABLE. FURTHERMORE, RESTORATION OF SYRIAN ELIGIBILITY FOR EXIM FINANCING WOULD NOT ONLY ENCOURAGE U.S. EXPORTS BUT ALSO CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL SIGNAL THAT THE U.S. HAS CONFIDENCE IN SYRIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IN ITS LONG-TERM PROSPECTS.

B. CONTACT WITH ARAB BOYCOTT AUTHORITIES. TO DATE THE U.S. HAS AVOIDED ALL CONTACT WITH ARAB BOYCOTT OFFICIALS ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT DID NOT WANT TO GIVE ANY FORM OF RECOGNITION TO THE BOYCOTT, EVEN THOUGH THIS HAD MEANT ON OCCASION INACCURATE AND INCOMPLETE INFORMATION ON THE BOYCOTT BEING AVAILABLE TO U.S. OFFICIALS AND LEGISLATORS. WITH THE INCREASING FOCUS ON THE ARAB CONFIDENTIAL

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BOYCOTT IN THE U.S. TODAY, IT MAY BE WORTH CONSIDERING WHETHER DIRECT CONTACT WITH ARAB BOYCOTT OFFICIAL FOR THE PURPOSES OF EXCHANGING ACCURATE INFORMATION AND INFLUENCING THEIR CONDUCT AND OUTLOOK MIGHT OFFER MORE ADVANTAGES TO US THAN THE PRESENT POLICY OF AVOIDING CONTACT.

10. MILITARY RELATIONS:

SINCE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN 1974, MILITARY RELATIONS HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO PERIODIC CONTACTS BETWEEN SYRIAN MILITARY AUTHORITIES AND THE U.S. DEFENSE ATTACHE OFFICE AIMED AT FACILITATING U.S. VISITS AND TRANSITS AND AT ANALYZING AND REPORTING ON SYRIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. OCCASIONAL SUGGESTIONS OF CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS BY INDIVIDUAL MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE BEEN COOLLY RECEIVED. CONVERSELY, THE SYRIAN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT REMAINS SUSPICIOUS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEFENSE ATTACHE AND OF U.S. MILITARY OBJECTIVES WITH REGARD TO SYRIA.

11. POSSIBLE ISSUES:

A. WHETHER THE U.S. SHOULD CONSIDER PROVIDING

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 PER-01 SIG-01 A-01  
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-----021439Z 034854 /41

R 021212Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2508  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
USCINCEUR  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT VIA POUCH

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SLECTED MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING TO THE SYRIAN ARMED FORCES. NO SUCH EQUIPMENT OR TRAINING HAVE BEEN PROVIDED SINCE THE 1967 BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. PROVISION OF SELECTED EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING, HOWEVER, EVEN IN SMALL AMOUNTS COULD HAVE THE BENEFICIAL RESULT OF DECREASING SYRIAN RELIANCE ON THE SOVIET UNION IN THE MILITARY SPHERE, ASSISTING IN DEVELOPING A MORE PRO-WEST ORIENTATION AMONG SYRIA'S OFTEN HIGHLY POLITICIZED MILITARY OFFICER CORPS AND SIGNALLING THAT, WITHIN THE LIMITS OF OUR FIRM MILITARY SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL, THE U.S. ALSO DESIRES A FRIENDLY COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA IN THE MILITARY SPHERE.

12. CULTURAL RELATIONS:

OFF TO A SLOW START AFTER RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS IN 1974, U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS NOW SHOW PROMISE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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SIDERABLE EXPANSION. A BILATERAL CULTURAL AGREEMENT SHOULD BE SIGNED IN 1977 AND AN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER OPENED. THESE INSTRUMENTS WILL ENHANCE THE PROSPECTS FOR ACHIEVING U.S. OBJECTIVES OF ENCOURAGING GREATER CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN U.S. AND SYRIA, INCREASING ACADEMIC AND ARTISTIC CONTACTS AND DEVELOPING A TRUER SYRIAN UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. SOCIETY AND POLICIES, ALL AIMED AT BROADENING AND DEEPENING BILATERAL RELATIONS IN SUPPORT OF U.S. POLITICAL INTERESTS.

13. CONSULAR RELATIONS:

THE PRIMARY PROBLEM REMAINS KNOWLEDGE OF AND CONSULAR ACCESS TO AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN DETAINED IN SYRIA. AS A RESULT OF REPEATED APPROACHES TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THE SECURITY SERVICES, SYRIAN PERFORMANCE IS GRADUALLY IMPROVING AND SHOULD CONTINUE TO DO SO.

14. CONCLUSION:

THE SINGLE OVERRIDING TOUCHSTONE OF U.S./SYRIAN RELATIONS IN THE PERIOD AHEAD WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE U.S. AND SYRIA CAN WORK TOGETHER TO PROMOTE OUR COMMON AIM OF



ACHIEVING A JUST PEACE SETTLEMENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND  
THE ARABS WILL BE THE DETERMINING FACTOR IN THE STRENGTH  
OF OUR OVERALL RELATIONSHIP AND OUR ABILITY TO ACHIEVE  
OTHER U.S. OBJECTIVES WITH REGARD TO SYRIA.  
MURPHY

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